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031904Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 010377

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INL/LP
DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND
DEPARTMENT FOR USMISSION OAS WASHDC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: COUNTERNARCOTICS PROGRAMS UNDER PUBLIC ATTACK

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Over the last few months our counternarcotics programs, particularly aerial eradication, have received substantial negative publicity and public comment. The discussion risks making the spray program even more of an issue in the upcoming Colombian elections than would normally be the case. This comes at a time when we are being asked to cut our budget, even though our programs are still producing record results and the GOC is looking for even more assistance. On November 2, President Uribe called the Ambassador to express his concerns. END SUMMARY

LEADING WEEKLY SAYS WAR IS LOST

12. (SBU) On October 12, "Semana," the leading Colombian weekly, ran a story entitled, "The War is Lost." The opening of the story stated, "For some renowned experts, the war against drugs is lost, and we have to go back to the drawing board and start again." The article was largely the result of a seminar held in the Los Andes University. Panelists were billed as experts from the United States, Europe, and Latin America. While the nations of Europe came under criticism, much of the seminar was devoted to well-worn comments about U.S. drug policy, such as the U.S. should worry more about demand; the U.S. is militarizing the battle against drugs in Colombia; U.S. counternarcotics efforts are contributing to human rights abuses and corruption; and aerial spraying is not effective in reducing supply. These types of articles and comments about our programs are commonplace in Colombia, but the fact that the seminar that generated these was at a prestigious conservative university and the article was carried by "Semana" magazine, the Colombian equivalent of Newsweek, is of some concern.

CONTROLLER GENERAL ASKS FOR REEVALUATION OF DRUG POLICY

13. (SBU) The leading daily "El Tiempo" ran an editorial on October 30 entitled, "A Failed Strategy." While much of the article was based on the seminar described in the preceding paragraph, the Colombian Controller General, Antonio Hernandez Gamarra, was reported to have said that Colombia was long overdue in putting national interests ahead of the drug war. The article also reported that he said there should be a cost-benefit analysis of a policy that has not managed to reduce supply. "El Tiempo" also reported that he said maybe it was time to see if prevention would be better than repression, and he suggested that dealing with this as a public health issue, instead of a police one, might be the way to go. These sorts of comments from a high-level GOC official are unusual and do not reflect the policy of President Uribe, but they do resonate with the public and our critics.

ECUADOR CONDEMNING SPRAY PROGRAM IN INTERNATIONAL COURT

14. (SBU) Ecuador's Ombudsman for the People has recently presented a case against Colombia and the aerial eradication program at the International Court of Human Rights (ICHR) in Costa Rica. The suit makes many false allegations regarding damage to human health and the environment as a result of aerial eradication efforts on the Colombian side of the Colombia-Ecuador border. The GOC has presented their defense based on sound science, including a recent study from CICAD, the OAS entity that deals with illicit narcotics. This study found no significant ill effects to human health or the environment. Whatever the outcome, this case has generated significant negative publicity for the spray program. As with all negative publicity, the Embassy makes an effort to counter it, but it is often an uphill battle. If the case were found to have merit, then there could perhaps be a court-ordered cessation of spraying along the Colombia-Ecuador border, or, worst case, a cessation of all

spraying. Post believes that if evaluated on the facts, the case will be found not to have merit, but the court's past decisions have not always been predictable.

PRESIDENT URIBE CALLS TO EXPRESS CONCERN

15. (C) President Uribe called the Ambassador early on November 2 to express concern about reports of renewed coca and opium poppy cultivation in Narino department and, more generally, along the Pacific coast. He cited the seminar and articles mentioned above as evidence of the pressure that the spray program is under and urged maximum U.S. effort in the short and medium term. He again raised the hope that we could fund a fourth spray package. Ambassador assured him that we were making a maximum effort and that we were focused on the Pacific coast, but again reiterated that funding levels would not permit a fourth spray package. The Ambassador noted that we were meeting that day with police, military, and other GOC officials in order to find ways to improve targeting of cultivation, while improving security for spray pilots from ground fire

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EMBASSY COMMENT: CRITICISM COULD IMPEDE PROGRAM
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16. (C) COMMENT: The recent criticism of our spray program may have an element of election-year posturing, but if it gains support, it nonetheless will impede the program. To date this year, we are still setting records for fumigation, seizures, money laundering arrests, and extraditions. END COMMENT
WOOD